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THE ADAPTATION OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION VALUATION METHODS IN HUNGARY

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Abstract

'Traditional' principles and methods of quality management systems without any alteration cannot be adopted when evaluating the quality of education. In the article we describe the evaluation systems used in western countries, then after a short review of the domestic legal regulations we show how the adaptation of foreign quality evaluation systems succeeded in Hungary. In the last part of the article we present a particular example of a course level quality evaluation system in connection with the MBA post-graduate course at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics, highlighting the possible problems and the options for improvement.

Keywords: quality management, education, quality evaluation.

1. Introduction

The first phase of the development of quality management systems has been finished in Hungary. The domestic producer and service companies who kept their competitiveness against the western multinational firms, willingly or as an answer to the market pressure, built up some kinds of a quality management system. At the new millennium, also in our country, the need of continuous quality control and improvement of different fields like state administration or education appeared in the first place as state responsibility (Commission of the EC., 1999).

The quality management systems developed during studying the 'traditional' principles of the private and profit interested mass production. Here a particular product was the result of the production, which in the sense of economic buyer's free market, could be sold at a price set by supply and demand. The user of the product, and its consumer, can be identified unambiguously. These principles and methods *cannot be used* without any alteration in areas of *not* (necessarily) *private, or non-profit oriented* special fields like state administration, local authority, or educational services. In these areas the market *is not built exclusively on the correlation between supply and demand*, but in more respects in a peculiar way it is *stately regulated*.

Different modes of the evaluation of quality of educational institutions were evolved in the USA and in the EU.

2. Methods of Quality Evaluation of the Education Abroad

In the US accreditation of higher education started already in the 30s, but the understanding of education quality was developed only by now. In the USA the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) were chosen in the education. TQM means, also in education, full commitment of managers toward efficient resource management, a sense of purpose in the institution management, active participation of all involved parties, human centred thinking, continued willingness for quality perfection *and taking into consideration the value judgement of all concerned* (see *Fig. 1*) *parties*. (MURGATROYD – MORGAN 1993).

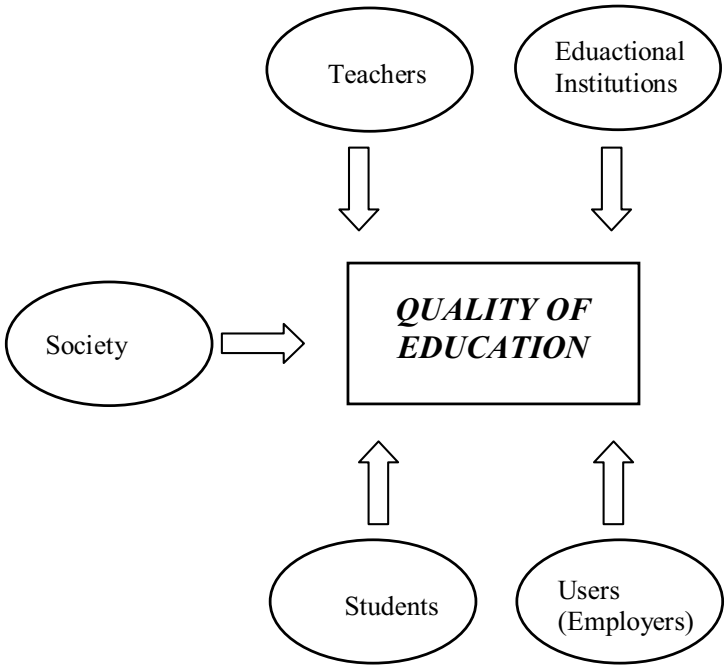

Fig. 1. Concerned parties of the quality of education

The *'production' and management abilities* of an institution and the *quality of its activities* create together its *quality-image*. The 'production' and management skills of an educational institution cannot be measured exactly, just estimated, and the quality of its activities depends on subjective value judgements of the interested parties (RITTER, 1996). How could we measure precisely the knowledge of a man, how could we describe numerically the effectiveness of the teaching of a subject, or the quality of a lecturer's function or production?

How should we compare the different locations, or circumstances under colleges and universities work? Various index systems were developed world-wide,

which endeavour to 'measure the unmeasurable' and define the quality level of educational institutions with more or less success.

In the United Sates educational institutions are evaluated through the terms and weighting of the Malcolm Baldridge National Quality Award, Education Criteria for Performance Excellence. This is an estimation based on *competencies* and *results* achieved in a certain period of time, which represents the change in the quality of the institution *compared to itself* (TENNER–DETORO, 1997). That is why it is not applicable for the comparison with others.

The essence of the *Dutch* HBC evaluation system lies in that the institution carries out self-evaluation. After that an external investigator (visitor) committee evaluates the educational, research and contribution activities. Based on these factors the committee issues a report about the present quality, and proposes recommendations for improvement. In this system the definition of quality and the variables used for evaluation, depend on which party's interest regards the committee values most important (see *Fig. 1*), or what considerations get priority (financial, social, managerial, etc.) (Association of Dutch Polytechnics and Colleges, 1993).

In *Scotland* indices were classified in three groups (MCCULLOCH, 1996):

- Quality indices: *attempt to measure* the benefit for participants, conditions of studying and the performance of institution management
- Background indices: measuring different quantitative features, e.g. budget, number of physical and human resources
- Statistics: quantitative indices which represent the utilisation of resources

This system is characterized by the most important one which belongs to the quality defining first groups, can be only subjectively estimated, although from the total of twenty, only the indices of the second and third group can be made numerical. That is why this method can be applied for the comparison of institutions with very similar, almost identical profiles, operating within the same circumstances. For this reason it is used in homogeneous public education.

In *Great Britain* for evaluation purposes a four-grade scale is employed. (Excellent – Quite satisfactory – Satisfactory – Not satisfactory) (YORE, 1995). Performance measurement is done by surveys filled out by students. Indices are classified into three groups: institution related (student/lecturer ratio, expenses, admission limits, etc.), performance related (scholarship, publications, number of external industrial assignments, achievements of students, fluctuation, etc.), social factors related (sex composition of students, variety of branches, etc.) All indices must have the following characteristics: validity, comprehensibility, authenticity, processability, and unmanipulatability.

In *Australia* the extended version of this system is used. The surveys filled out by students relate to five question groups: knowledge of students, effectiveness of lectures in the training programme, administration of the programme, and the management, the attainable chances, and the practicability of the qualification obtained in the programme.

At the processing of the results, attention should be paid to the fact that different educational forms cannot be compared to each other. Only the effectiveness of

courses can be compared. Achievements of a certain university or college should not be set as standard for others.

The quality evaluation system of the *European Federation of National Engineering Associations* (www.feani.org, 2000) examines 16 question groups. Among them there are questions of the institution management (quality policy, responsibility and competence of the management, way of entering into contracts, etc.), subjects of the operation of the training programmes (programme planning and supervision, documentation, programme regulation, admission, evaluation, etc.), and fields of human and other resources (recruitment, further education and development of staff, new accessions and services, statistics, etc.).

3. Legal Framework of the Quality Assurance in the Hungarian Education

In Hungary there are famous, centuries old universities. According to several opinions this 'glorious past' itself is the guarantee for high quality, so there is no need for any kind of external or internal evaluation system. In the 90s the conditions of university operations, and the educational environment underwent a considerable change. Gates have opened up for many people, for a long time with only small numbers operating, 'elite-maker' Hungarian higher education admitted a doubled number of students in a couple of years. These changes required the reworking of legal regulations.

The Hungarian Parliament passed the first autonomous Act of Higher Education in 1993. (Henceforth abbreviated: AHE). This act defined, also in terms of the quality management of education, the fundamental laws which relate to the establishment of higher educational institutions, state acknowledgement, autonomy of institutions, forms of higher education, requirements to meet by lecturers, etc. (AHE, 1993). The act disposed over the establishment of the National Accreditation Committee (after the modification in 1996, from 1997: Hungarian Accreditation Committee, MAB) with the responsibility of setting up the quality-control system of the national higher education institutions on the bases of the foreign examples.

This act served as *the foundation stone of the national educational policy*. According to this act the higher education development act should have been done as part of the national educational quality issue policy, which has not been formulated so far. Instead of this only a parliamentary decision was passed (OGYH, 1995) to set the goals of the state in connection with the development of higher education. Thanks to the '*financial approach*' which appeared in the decision, modified in 1996, AHE considers the institutional *integration* the only repository of the realisation of the institutional reform. It is true that the principle of integration is in line with the Deming axiom, that the basis of all quality development should be the reduction of 'product' diversity, after that the improvement of the 'average' quality (DEMING, 1982). The *enforcement of integration*, moreover the tightening of the terms of accreditation actually declaring it compulsory, resulted in *quality declension* then advancement in the short run. Imposed a too short, altogether two-year deadline

for emergence, which was abhorrent to the lifecycle of a university, or pace of evolution. This led to a lot of great pressure and friction, and these ambiguous conditions affected the quality of education negatively.

The quality regulation of the *first level* of the education (*Fig. 2*) has been performed on codification level. According to the principles laid down in these laws on the *second and third levels*, that means the daily educational work, higher educational *institutions* should develop their own regulations and have their quality management system operated. This work has not been finished in most of the higher educational institutions or exists only in firstlings. In the last part of our article we would like to demonstrate an evaluation model operating on the third level through one of the few existing quality management systems.

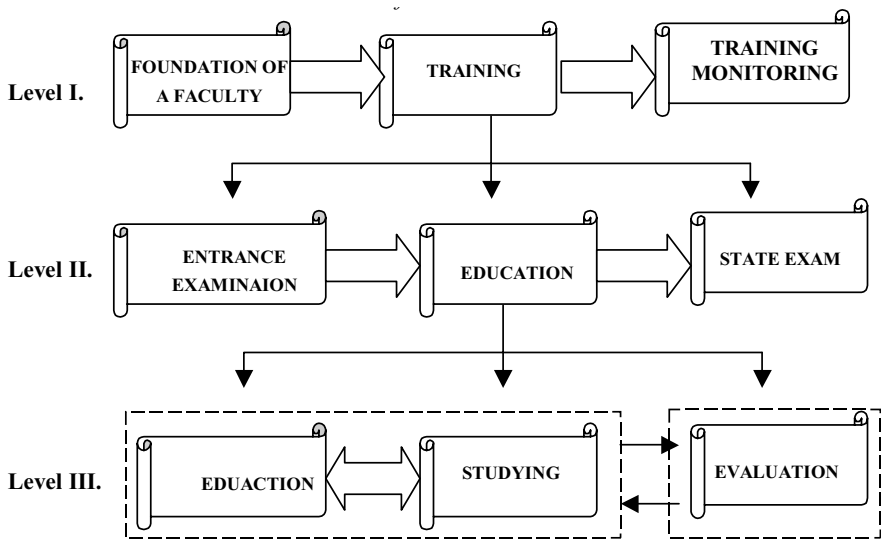

Fig. 2. Phases of the education process

4. Institutional Accreditation in Hungary

The *accreditation* as an abstraction originally meant a kind of *licence* of a delegated person's (diplomat's) *authority* and rights. In the Anglo-Saxon countries the accreditation of institutions, among them also the educational institutions, developed from the 'process of personal legitimisation' of this person. From many legitimisation processes in this area they use nowadays only two methods:

1. Professional accreditation: The branch of the given *profession* examines the educational process, and the issued certificates, and they authenticate that the

institution educates the profession on the adequate level. The Chemical Engineers Faculty of the Veszprém University received this kind of accreditation, and it was given by the Organisation of the British Institution of Chemical Engineers. (www.vein.hu/mk/szak/vegyeszmernoki.shtml, 2000).

2. Regional accreditation: A *board* appointed by a *state*, or by several states (region), accredits that the institution meets answer for the requirements of the concerning laws, and is authorised to issue certificates.

With the authorisation of the Act of Higher Education the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (MAB) continues to accredit the institutions of the higher education since 1993. By applying the experiences of a number of countries the MAB developed its own evaluation system. This criteria system consists of nine main points, which contain further subpoints. Subpoints will be measured on hundred punctual scale, then weighted and summed up. Main points are listed in *Table 1*.

Table 1. Requirements of the National Quality Award for the higher education

1. Management
2. Business policy and strategy
3. Employee management
4. Resources
5. Processes
6. Customer satisfaction (external and internal clients)
7. Employee satisfaction
8. Social impact
9. Business results

The core of the rating is the criteria system of the *Hungarian National Quality Award* which was established after the almost identical *US*[1] and *EU* evaluation systems. With the help of these criteria systems the ability for quality performance of the institution (*capabilities*) and the quality of its activities can be stated (*results*) (MAB, 2000).

We emphasise that this means estimation, and only characterises the quality change of the institution *in comparison to itself*. It is not suitable for comparing different institutions. Restricted comparison can be made in the area of quality development results.

Similar to the *Dutch* system as first step the institution goes through a self-evaluation process. Then welcomes a Visiting Committee appointed by the MAB that carries on a three month long examination period. At the end of the process, the committee proposes the accreditation of the course, or discontinuance of the

[1]USA: Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, EU: European Foundation for Quality Management

institution's right to issue certificates, or even the abolishment of the institution or other steps assuring the level of education. According to the *British system*, it is a step back that during the accreditation process the connections of the institution to the industrial sector are not evaluated. Let us parenthesise that most of the higher educational institutions in Hungary did not succeed in developing an industrial background that would significantly (and surely positively) affect the quality of education.

By 1999 the *accreditation process* of the Hungarian higher educational institutions *has finished*. Commendable are the institutions and the system itself, that the MAB was forced to suspend the right of certificate issuing only in one case. Several institutions received *temporary accreditation* between 1993 – 1998 mainly because they did not correspond to the conditions of being a 'university'. For the *institutions of this type* the only *solution was the integration*. For the sake of continued quality development all institutions should issue annual report on their quality matters and situation and MAB would perform an *accreditation audit every four years*, and *every eight years* they *repeat* the whole accreditation process.

5. The Quality Evaluation System of the MBA Course at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BUTE)

The quality assessment of the first level of the training course (see *Fig.2*) is settled by the accreditation. Terms and conditions of founding a specialisation, the general approach of the training, the training pursuance are set, the processes are regulated and shadowing is available for MAB. In all specialisations the *observation of the quality of the teaching-learning-assessment process* (*Fig.2*, level 3) *and continued quality improvement are needed*. At the Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BUTE) MBA within the postgraduate specialisation course an attempt was made to settle this need by implementing an assessment system that is based exclusively on student feedback.

The MBA Course at the BUTE: From the Teaching of Quality toward the Quality of Teaching...

Starting in 1992 with one small group of MBA students, today more than 800 students in 10 groups are involved in the MBA programme. The fast expansion is due to its organization and the high quality of the education.

A considerably growing dominance of quality management related courses was typical of the Hungarian higher education of the 90s. Eagerness to improve the quality of education was on the contrary very rare to observe. Besides the teaching of quality management, at our university, together with a few others in the country, the development and improvement of the quality of education have also appeared, although not on whole university level, but at postgraduate courses in any case.

To understand the development of the quality evaluation system the specialities of the operation of a higher educational training of this type should be seen clearly. We have to mention it in the first place that these programmes are *self-sustaining*, and this condition creates entirely different circumstances as compared to the stately financed courses. The other main element is that courses with this kind of profile are obliged to *compete with others*. At last an *adult educational*, post-graduate profile should be mentioned that results in fundamentally different student attitudes and preferences.

The Basis of the Continuous Development is the Evaluation System

The present form of the MBA programme was designed mainly according to the *qualificatory feedback given by students*. At the end of every semester, after totally finished exams students fill in surveys about every detail of the actual semester (BME, MBA 2000).

The assessment is done with regard to the following five main aspects:

- the necessity, usefulness of the subject
- the lecturer's efficiency, the level of his/her lecture
- the conduciveness of the working papers
- the method of the exam, fairness
- other students comments

The questions of the survey were defined partially according to foreign experiences, and the concepts of the leaders of the programme. By now surveys are easy to evaluate. It is mentioned last but we consider the 'other comments' the most valuable feedback. This question is accountable for collecting very diverse, mainly 'comfort' and course organisational needs, and *opposite to the answers given to the first four aspects it shows individual and exceptional cases not average.*

By the evaluation of lecturers the level of the lecture would be considered 50% weight, the working papers and the exam 25–25%. *In the creation of the syllabus, content of a subject, students are of course not allowed to put in their thoughts, they have only 'opinant right'*. Pieces of information of these kinds will be used optionally in syllabus development the long run. They do not influence rating of the lecturers.

The final result of the individual lecturers' evaluation will never be discussed! Resulting that the management of the courses apart from setting the frame of the educational process they would never declare what and how to teach. Every lecturer is allowed to work according to his/her own methods and ideas, the only authoritative is the students' judgement at the end of each semester.

Below an average rating lecturer is not allowed teaching any more. Due to this system in the last three years 30% of the lecturers were replaced. *Those who remained competition is intense which condition is very advantageous for the quality of the education.*

There is also big difference among the lecturers performing above the average. Among the approximately 60–70 lecturers working in the programme the 5–10 best get fairly high compensation, and due to this, top lecturers of the programme are not exposed to the ensnaring effect of the business. Because payments depend on student judgements the board of lecturers consists of excellent teachers and practising business professionals. Today the programme can rely on a stable group of lecturers which exercises a good influence on the quality of the education.

Student-Centred Educational Services

Being student-centred is not just a slogan, but a vision as well. Since in the graduate education, having different characteristics and objectives, all needs of students cannot be considered, in the post-graduate education, with regard to the special conditions of the adult education and the market-orientation, it is absolutely true, that *the opinion of the majority of students is considered absolutely true*. In other words: *in organisational and technical* questions 'the customer is always right.' It is our principal idea that everything considered good by the majority of students is good and all organisational and education technical questions that most of the students do not like should be improved immediately. *We would like to stress again that this principle should not be applied to the content of subjects and the structure of the syllabus.*

In fact the question is not how the students are able to identify the main problems of the educational process, but the board of lecturers or other committee of the university would perform a better, more realistic and objective assessment instead. Our answer is definite: in most cases it is cleverer to rely on adult students' views.

Difficulties of the Qualifying System Based on Student Feedback

Favouritism in the evaluation, mainly shown to facultative subjects, in several occasions difficulties arise. Mostly those who have more interest in the subject in advance choose these courses, and they rate them disproportionately higher. It also happens that due to tactical consideration in the credit collection process those choose a subject who are absolutely not interested, and because of this they give disproportionately lower rating. Finally, students with their rating are representing their likes and dislikes, but the before mentioned conditions may alter the results. With obligatory subjects this problem does not occur since a large amount of students evaluate and these factors are not perceptible.

Distortions occur with regard to semesters, too. Taking someone for example who in a certain semester teaches with more professional colleagues may get poorer rating than before, and vice-versa.

The objective evaluation gets more difficult because in connection with some subjects the weakness or importance or value of a subject may turn out only some semesters after and then they cannot evaluate back in the past.

It happened occasionally and mainly with facultative or special disciplines that simply *no better lecturer is available*, and even if students ask for a change, he remains. In these cases to prevent principles of evaluation and quality service the first number of lectures will be reduced and last of all his/her subject will be terminated or replaced with another one.

In spite of the above problems *80% of the lecturers' grades* show *a maximum of 0.1 scattering* regardless to which course or year he/she teaches at.

Terms of the System Operation

Finally, we have to draw attention to the fact that many others tried to adopt the system partially or as a whole, for effective operation some conditions are by all means needed:

- The evaluation results should be 'unmercifully' used for compensation and dismissal purposes.
- Large student number for the applicability of statistical methods.

The quality evaluation system applied for post-graduate courses may be used as the basis of the quality management system, to be implemented at the Economics and Social Sciences Faculty, founded in 1998, at the name and strategy changing Budapest University of Technical and Economics Sciences, as of January 1, 2000. This faculty launches the high level education of graduate economists and manages the continuous quality improvement process.

The system requires adaptation for the conditions of the graduate education, but should be added that at the MBA courses of the BME the system proved to operate well and some of its fundamental principles by all means will be useful for the regular courses of the University.

6. Summary

In the 21st century the quality management of the higher education will play an important role in the advanced western educational systems. At present a number of models are used for the evaluation of educational institutions, and examining either the systems based on National Quality Awards (USA, EU) or systems of the different professional organisations (FEANI), or the systems based on mostly student (customer) evaluation (Great Britain, Australia), *it is expressible that each system is based on subjective judgements*.

Hungary is still missing the consistent system of performance indicators adapted to the domestic educational circumstances. In the lack of this, we rely

on the Hungarian accreditation requirements moulded into one from different systems applied abroad, and we try to 'classify', or accreditate our institutions of higher education.

There is great insufficiency regarding the implementation of quality evaluation tools.

Only a few institutions started the development of their local faculty, or specialisation level quality evaluating system. Unfortunately, the demonstrated, operating system is as rare as a blue diamond. Should we be ready with this, another great task is to be accomplished, that is the application of the quality evaluation system developed for the education, for the other basic activity of the higher education, which is research-and-development, and the administrative activities that serve them.

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